Yenangyaung oilfields, support of Ministers, and the indifference of the less worthy sections of University staff and students towards the nationalist movement. 873 668

The crowning event of my years there was the great strike of 1936 when about 600 students got into buses just before the final examinations and encamped themselves on the slopes of the Shwe Dagon Pagoda hill, with much sympathy and material support from the public, the men returning every morning to picket the black-leg examination candidates by lying across all exits and entrances—a completely successful technique, for it is an unthinkable insult to a Buddhist male to have his body trodden on, and no Burman, or Burma Indian or Chinese for that matter, will dare to inflict such an insult. Some of the strikers felt, after the rallying speeches in the Union, that they were striking to evict an immoral member of the staff who had the support of the Principal whom they considered an autocrat; others knew that definite demands had been put forward for the amendment of the University Act, the ultimate result of which would be to make this Principal more accountable to Burmese political leaders; a great majority felt a wave of unnameable exaltation as they stormed hall after hall for recruits, ringing bells and shouting, "Come on, sisters, the day of freedom has arrived at last!" and almost all banged and cheered as they drove away, on the roofs, the steps and the wheels of the buses, at the thought of no examinations that year, and the exciting days of picketing ahead. But it was a tragic and unhappy time for some who did not have money to waste on another year before graduation and who trusted that the authorities would succeed in holding the examinations, or for others who did not join out of personal loyalties of the moment and who had friends and brothers with impassioned convictions on the other side. I shall always remember the face of my friend Ko Ohn, as he refused to let a doctor into Inya Hall to attend to a sick non-striker, his good face so full of distress and his longyi all smudged with the melted tarmac of the road in which he had been lying under the hot March sun. "Please, we must do it," he said; "I am so thirsty and my head is aching, but we must do it for our country." [547]

One of the reasons for the focussing of public interest on the University students was the great interest taken in the development of the young women there. The male students, like the public, were not interested in them only for reasons of courtship or companionship, but took a keen objective interest in them. It has been said of Burma that she has no feminist movements because none have been necessary; the women have always had all the rights they wanted. But it goes further than that. Burmese men take a sincere pride in the achievements of a woman who can successfully invade spheres outside her domestic tasks. 873 562 179

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 APl Burma
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CHAPTER XXXIV

A WORK OF MERIT

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"THE wisdom that made Asia mild" laid down no command which is better observed in Burma than the first of the Five Rules: Thu a-thet go ma that hnit (Thou shalt not take any life at all). Hardened convicts will not harm the vermin that infest their mattresses. A story is told of a man who allowed the snake that had killed his father to wriggle away unmolested through the tall elephant grass. I myself have seen a Burmese mother take up between two bits of bamboo the scorpion that had stung her little son, and simply throw the hideous creature out of the house. So far does the command to beware how they harm any meanest thing in its upward path lead earnest Buddhists. Mr. Edwin Arnold tells how, in a distant age, the great Lord Buddha offered up himself to preserve "this breath of fleeting life" in an animal:

> Drought withered all the land; the young rice died
> Ere it could hide a quail.

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When between the hot walls of a nullah, our Lord spied, as he passed, a starving tigress, with two little cubs whining for the nourishment her shrunken frame could not give them. Then, heeding nought but the immense compassion of a Budh, the great yahan bethought himself:

"Lo! if I feed her, who shall lose but I?" and, throwing off his priestly robes, came forth with a "Ho! mother, here is meat for thee!" and died.

"So large the Master's heart was long ago," before he came upon earth for the last time to teach the Law and give

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

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These personal examples furnished by the teacher of neh'ban and the Law himself have only served to emphasise what is seen on the admission of every new member to the holy assembly. One of the articles with which, in addition to his dress and begging-bowl, every postulant must provide himself, is a strainer, without using which he must drink no water. The object is, of course, to prevent him from destroying life in the shape of the small animalcula to be found in water. Some zealous and scientific proselytiser endeavoured, by the use of microscopes, to persuade the people that this was of no avail, seeing that even in the strained water there was abundance of animal life; but a council decided that, provided the water had been filtered, if the ascetic could detect nothing living with his unaided eyes he was at liberty to drink the water without incurring blood-guiltiness. The attacks of science on Buddhism failed as completely as the efforts of most missionaries.

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The mingled pity and dislike with which professional hunters and fishermen, whose occupation implies the regular taking of life, are viewed by Buddhists, is well known, and makes itself evident in the fact that the villains in most plays are hunters. Fishermen are perhaps not so much decried—possibly on account of the plea brought forward on their behalf, that the fish die of themselves, being taken out of the water, and not through any direct action of their captors. It is in connection with fish, however, that one of the most curious national works of merit takes place annually—furnishing, like all Burmese festivals, occasion for much fun and frolic.

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The violence of the rain during the five or six months of the south-west monsoon floods the country. Not only do the rivers, which in many places rise regularly as much as thirty or forty feet above their hot-weather level—not only do they overflow their banks, and make wide seas of the neighbouring flat lands, but great lakes spring up everywhere. These are gradually stocked with fish of all kinds, most of which, by the sudden fall of the water, are cut off from all chance of retreat to the large rivers, where alone there is safety. Steadily the water goes down, the hot sun sucks up the pools, till at last the end seems to be come. The river

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

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is far away, and there will be no rain for months. Another day or two will suffice to bake and split into long fissures the bottom of the puddle, wherein are yet hundreds of animate things, from the whiskered mud-fish to the lordly hilsa, the salmon of India. Then the seekers after merit come out, bearing with them big chatties, huge earthenware jars, the size of some of which makes the story of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* seem very much more credible. Girls and boys, old men and old women, go tramping about in the soft slush, capturing the fish and dropping them into the jars of water. Great laughter there is over the wild plunges and flounderings of the boys, the little screams and "a-mè lele, a-mè le-taw" of the girls as they step upon a fish, which whizzes away with a suddenness that is apt to disturb the equilibrium, or slip with one leg slowly but irremediably into a hole—perhaps a last year's buffalo-wallow—out of which they are only extricated after much teasing and tickling by the boys. Then there is the stalking and driving of a great nga-gyi into a corner, whence with a flop and a muddy dash he escapes into the middle again, amidst a chorus of the inevitable amè! ("mother") which springs to a Burman's lips on all possible and unexpected occasions. There is the caution to be observed in seizing the stinging mud-fish, the gingerliness with which, when he is caught, the waving whiskers are avoided; especially the control over yourself to be maintained if he does sting you, lest you should spoil all your chance of merit in a moment of irritation, by doing him an injury. Sometimes the fish are caught in nets; but this reckless wastefulness in the matter of combining merit with merriment is not very favourably viewed by the neighbourhood.

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At last the fish are all caught and crowded together in the sin-o—the water-jars. There is, perhaps, a considerable pause before they are liberated. The nga-hlut pwè usually occurs a little after the carnival of the water feast, when everybody is doused with water; and if the fish have been rescued from their danger some time before that, they have to wait in their uncomfortable quarters all the longer. The *fête* seems to be celebrated with more enthusiasm in Maulmein than in any other large town in Lower Burma.

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
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amusement to both native and English spectators. The fun goes on all the way with jokes at the expense both of the performers and the lookers-on, and shouts and roars of laughter at every new buffoonery. At last they reach the spot on the river-bank selected for freeing the fish, and after a few pious formulæ have been recited, the contents of the jars are capsized into the water. Many of the fish are already dead, and not a few are so sickly that there is little chance of their escaping being eaten by cannibal brethren; but this does not disturb the equanimity of any one. A great kaunghmu has been done, much merit has been gained, and there has been great fun over it. The motley procession wends its way back again, and everybody goes at nightfall to see the great kyi-gyin pwè given by some public-spirited and drama-loving quarter or street in the town.

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
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526 any more than dancing the Highland Fling can, for judgment as to superiority in either case must be a mere matter of personal opinion, and cannot be governed by hard and fast rules.

These are practically the only outdoor national games. Boxing is a very common institution, but there is no ordinary practice in the evenings, and when a let-pwè comes off it is a regular ceremony more resembling what would be called in Europe a match, or a tournament, than a game. A good deal of agility and skill is shown, leaps into the air, and kicks with the bare feet, and violent upward knocks with the knee finding a place which would not be allowed by the "fancy." The first drawing of blood decides a contest, however slight the injury may be. But boxing is not common now. Among the Karens near Maulmein it is still regularly [577] kept up, and no young man would be successful in his courting unless he had taken part on some occasion or other at a let-pwè. In Rangoon nowadays contests are of regular occurrence at feast times, but the displays are in sheds and entry money is charged. Elsewhere they are not often seen, [562] and the rule that no women shall be present is always rigorously kept.

524 What may be called indoor games are numerous and various. There is a game very much like the English one known as Fox and Geese. There are three big tigers, and eleven or sometimes twelve little ones. It is called legwet kya, and the object is for the big tigers to hunt down on a draught board and eat the little ones. If, however, the cubs can corner the big ones, and prevent them from taking a leap, the latter have to succumb—starve to death in fact. Another game called pasit, or chwe pyitthi, or ansa pyitthi is a steeplechase kind of arrangement, and is a favourite with children and simple country people. It is played on a board shaped and divided like that in the figure.

Cowries are used instead of dice, and the object is to complete the tour of the board as fast as possible, and to take as many opponents as you can on the way. Thus if there were two playing, the first thrower would enter at *a*, and having reached *b*, would continue from *a* to *c*, from *c* to *d*, and so on. The second would commence at *a* also, but

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
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mandarin. The same hatred of labour leads to an excessive love of cunning, and also to thieving, to which they are much addicted. . . . It would seem that it is impossible for this people to tell the truth; nay, a person who ventures to do it is called a fool, a good kind of man, but not fitted for managing his affairs." Still the padre has a little good to say of them: "Besides giving daily alms to their talapoins, they all lay by something to be applied to some sort of public benefit. They are very fond of thus signalising their generosity, and will often deprive themselves of comforts to have the pleasure of being benefactors to the public." This is an unlovely picture. But the good father was apparently very unfortunate in his acquaintances.

It is pleasant after this to turn to a soldier's opinion. Major Grant Allen says: "Unlike the generality of Asiatics, the Burmese are not a fawning race. They are cheerful, and singularly alive to the ridiculous; buoyant, elastic, soon recovering from personal or domestic disaster. Free from the prejudices of caste or creed, they readily fraternise with strangers, and at all times frankly yield to the superiority of the European. . . . Indifferent to the shedding of blood on the part of their rulers, yet not individually cruel; temperate, abstemious, and hardy, but idle, with neither fixedness of purpose nor perseverance. Discipline, or any continued employment, becomes most irksome to them, yet they are not devoid of a certain degree of enterprise."

This is a much better certificate, but still we are accused of laziness. Let us now turn to the last and the best authority on the subject (from an English point of view), Colonel Horace Browne, at one time Commissioner of Pegu, and always very popular with the Burmese. The Burman, he says, "displays much spasmodic energy and general laziness, much love of feasts and shows, much disregard of the sacredness of human life, and much tenderness for the lives of inferior members of the animal kingdom, much arrogance and inconsiderateness when placed in high position, and last, though not least, much general truthfulness, and, amongst unsophisticated villagers, the very unoriental trait of being unable to tell a specious falsehood."

The hauteur complained of towards strangers is princi-

14: Brant E-5 (1949-50) 1954 APl Burma
Burmese AP4

IV

RELIGION

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The people of Tadagale are overwhelmingly Theravada Buddhist in faith. The exceptions are the Indian minority, who are largely Hindus. There are three Indians who profess Mohammedanism, and three Indo-Burmans and one Pakistani of like faith. Being Burmese and Buddhist are almost identified in the thinking of the majority, as evidenced by the fact that almost all replied 'Burmese Buddhist' to the question, 'To what people do you consider yourself to belong?'

In discussing the religious life of Tadagale, realism calls for emphasis upon actual religious beliefs and behavior, rather than any extended setting down of the formal theology of Buddhism. The latter has been done in any number of specialized works, to which the interested reader may refer. Here we shall refer to Buddhist precepts insofar as is necessary to illuminate religious beliefs and practices of the villagers.

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The Five Precepts or Commandments. Almost all villagers know well the fundamental Buddhist injunctions against the taking of life in any form, the consumption of alcohol, illicit sexual activity, theft, and prevarication. These moral rules are, of course, sometimes breached. In Tadagale, the use of alcohol, sometimes to excess, is perhaps the most notable instance. The 'good Buddhist' does not, however, seem to experience feelings of guilt or pangs of conscience in such matters. Rather, the following of the moral precepts has instrumental value for him, in relation to his accumulation of merit and his reincarnation after death.

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Merit. One's behavior throughout life determines one's store of merit, and this, in turn, determines one's reincarnation after death. Morally proper behavior, such as the following of the five basic commandments of Buddhist faith, is regarded as contributing to one's store of merit and thus enhancing one's state of reincarnation after death. Religious acts, such as making daily offerings of food to the monks, saying prayers, and attending the pagoda festivals on the important sacred days are likewise considered to increase one's merit. Breaking the moral precepts, irreligiousity, acting selfish or quarrelsome, detract from merit and accordingly tend to lower one's state in reincarnation.

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Such is about the extent of the average villager's lay conception and understanding of the moral code and the ideas of the afterlife in Buddhism. He has little or no knowledge of the detailed concepts of reincarnation, with its elaborate gradationary ladder leading from the four states of punishment up to the ultimate achievement of Nirvana. Such theological learning is the property of the monkhood and of a few laymen who spent more than the usual few years as pupils in the monastic school.

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Functions of the Monks. The functions of the Buddhist monks in the village may be conveniently classified as three-fold: formal education; officiation at certain rites; and providing personal advice and guidance to individuals.

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With respect to formal education, the monks of four monasteries close to the village conduct schools which are attended by a considerable number of

16 Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

son's name, and 'Traitor, traitor!' till the hills were full of sound.

The Burman turned away.

'You see,' he said, 'how they hate me. What would be the good of charms?'

The voice was quiet, and the camp sank into stillness, and ere long the moon set, and it was quite dark.

He was a brave man, and, indeed, there are many brave men amongst the Burmese. They kill leopards with sticks and stones very often, and even tigers. They take their frail little canoes across the Irrawaddy in flood in a most daring way. They in no way want for physical courage, but they have never made a cult of bravery; it has never been a necessity to them; it has never occurred to them that it is the prime virtue of a man. You will hear them confess in the calmest way, 'I was afraid.' We would not do that; we should be much more afraid to say it. And the teaching of Buddhism is all in favour of this. Nowhere is courage—I mean aggressive courage—praised. No soldier could be a fervent Buddhist; no nation of Buddhists could be good soldiers; for not only does Buddhism not inculcate bravery, but it does not inculcate obedience. Each man is the ruler of his life, but the very essence of good fighting is discipline, and discipline, subjection, is unknown to Buddhism. Therefore the inherent courage of the Burmans could have no assistance from their faith in any way, but the very contrary: it fought against them.

There is no flexibility in Buddhism. It is a law.

16 Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

himself by evil intentions and deeds. Therefore in your intercourse with others remember always yourself, remember that no one can injure you but yourself; be careful, therefore, of your acts for your own sake. For if you lose your temper, who is the sufferer? Yourself; no one but yourself. If you are guilty of disgraceful acts, of discourteous words, who suffers? Yourself. Remember that; remember that courtesy and good temper are due from you to everyone. What does it matter who the other person be? you should be courteous to him, not because he deserves it, but because you deserve it. Courtesy is measured by the giver, not by the receiver. We are apt sometimes to think that this continual care of self is selfishness; it is the very reverse. Self-reverence is the antipode of self-conceit, of selfishness. If you honour yourself, you will be careful that nothing dishonourable shall come from you. 'Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control'; we, too, have had a poet who taught this.

And so dignity of manner is very marked amongst this people. It is cultivated as a gift, as the outward sign of a good heart.

'A rough diamond'; no Burman would understand this saying. The value of a diamond is that it can be polished. As long as it remains in the rough, it has no more beauty than a lump of mud. If your heart be good, so, too, will be your manners. A good tree will bring forth good fruit. If the fruit be rotten, can the tree be good? Not so. If your manners are bad, so, too, is your heart. To be courteous, even-tempered, to be tolerant and full of sympathy, these are the proofs of an inward

16 Fielding Hall G-3 (1885-1890) 1898 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

156 577 goodness. You cannot have one without the other. Outward appearances are not deceptive, but are true.

Therefore they strive after even temper. Hot-tempered as they are, easily aroused to wrath, easily awakened to pleasure, men with the passions of a child, they have very great command over themselves. They are ashamed of losing their temper; they look upon it as a disgrace. We are often proud of it; we think sometimes we do well to be angry.

And so they are very patient, very long-suffering, accepting with resignation the troubles of this world, the kicks and spurns of fortune, secure in this, that each man's self is in his own keeping. If there be trouble for to-day, what can it matter if you do but command yourself? If others be discourteous to you, that cannot hurt you, if you do not allow yourself to be discourteous in return. Take care of your own soul, sure that in the end you will win, either in this life or in some other, that which you deserve. What you have made your soul fit for, that you will obtain, sooner or later, whether it be evil or whether it be good. The law of righteousness is for ever this, that what a man deserves that he will obtain. And so in the end, if you cultivate your soul with unwearying patience, striving always after what is good, purifying yourself from the lust of life, you will come unto that lake where all desire shall be washed away.

21: Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

of course there were limits to the latitude allowed to him. The neglect of these conventions was supposed to result in disaster to the troupe and the death through diarrhoea of the actor who took the part or cracked the joke, and it would certainly result in the whole troupe being beaten by the audience and then put in prison by the officials. On the whole, the charge of irreligiousness attributed to the actors was not justified, and throughout the years, they had never been known even to attempt to evade the conventions. There were also conventions connected with social decorum. Kissing was not allowed on the stage. Although no penalty, supposed or real, was attached to it, this convention has never been broken. The actors could wear reproductions of all the regalia of a king, except the golden shoes, which only the king himself and princes in the line of succession could wear. The breaking of this rule was supposed to result in the death by diarrhoea of the actor who wore the shoes, but it was not punishable as a crime if they were actually worn on the stage, and it is known to have been broken sometimes. All the conventions, including those connected with spirit-dancing, still exist at the present day.

During the decadent period the platform stage, the elaborate scenery and curtains were introduced from French and English sources, for French touring companies often performed before the court towards the close of Mindon's reign (1853–78), and from about 1870 English touring companies of actors often visited Rangoon. With the performances of these companies of European actors, the general public had no contact. At the court the king and a few courtiers, out of respect for the French embassy, witnessed presentations of French operettas, but as they did not understand French and the actors could speak no Burmese, the court found the performances boring at times. At Rangoon the English actors presented musical comedies, or more truly, musical shows, to an audience composed entirely of English residents. It must be stated that the touring actors did in no way introduce specimens of the French or English dramas, for what they presented were third-rate musical shows. But they did introduce some examples of western stage-craft, and the Burmese professional actors, ever on the alert for borrowings, copied wholesale the platform stage, the curtain, and the elaborate stage scenery, with the result that, during the decadent period, the Burmese stage came to be a copy of the European stage. At Rangoon a permanent theatre was even built, a thing unknown to

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Burmese AP4

next to a parent, with a life-long devotion.

Before or after the monastic novitiate, it is the custom for the Burman lads to have themselves tattooed from the waist to the knee (No. 152). Not to submit to this ordeal is to incur the reproach of cowardice. The tattooing is an intricate pattern of animals and tracery. Owing to the extent of surface involved, the process is most painful. It occupies days or weeks, according to the fortitude of the subject, who is drugged with opium for the occasion. The instrument has a handle weighted at the butt, and a long point of bronze, split like a ruling-pen. It is worked with great rapidity. The pigment is a kind of lamp-black of the consistence of ink. It shows bluish black through the brown skin. When a Burman tucks up his loin-cloth, as he always does for work or exercise (*kaddung-chaik*), he looks as if he had black knee-breeches. As plain as the contrast is to the eye, ordinary photographic plates fail to render it. In No. 153 it appears fully. On other parts of the body the men frequently have horoscopes and cabalistic diagrams tattooed with vermilion (*se-ni*, No. 162) for luck and bravado. The Shan practice of letting in gold and silver discs the size of two-penny pieces—beneath the skin—is sometimes imitated by Burmans as a charm against sword-cuts and bullets (*ddbyi*; *thenabbyi*). The Arakanese, who repudiate the custom of *tigwin*, ascribe it to a Burman King, who endeavoured to disguise his leprosy in this way.

27. VILLAGE LAY SCHOOL.

28. KITE-FLYING.

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Burmese AP4

39. PAINTING OF SHINLAUNG PETE.

The constituted daily routine of the monastery takes no account of recreation. In practice there is a wide margin of leisure. But the wearer of the yellow robe is not seen at play. Arithmetical puzzles are the nearest approach to a game. On the other hand, the cheerfulness of the race suffers no restraint. There is decorum, without austerity or sanctimony. The severest penance laid upon the novice is temporary relegation to the secular state (*lein-byan*) for such faults as lying, theft, or killing anything. Cruelty to an animal is punished with caning.

The *yahán* exercise no exclusive function beyond that of admitting candidates to the novitiate and the full membership of their Assembly. The affairs of the Buddhist Church are initiated and conducted by the laity. The recluses merely add, by their presence, to the religious distinction of an occasion. At the shrine the recluse is like any other pilgrim; he never is a ministrant or priest. Neither is there any altar. The only material objects to which sanctity pertains are the relics of the Buddha. The members of the Assembly know no distinctions of men, racial or social. As regards the temporal power, of whatever origin, the recluse should be absolutely passive, neither contravening the laws nor invoking them when he suffers wrong. The recluse neither denounces nor harbours the criminal, a neutral attitude of which criminals are not slow to take advantage.

When admitted to full membership of the Assembly instituted by the Buddha (*Thingá*, Pali *Saṅgha*), the novice becomes *Yahán* (*Yahán-daw*, *Rahán*, *Arahan*), which signifies *perfected*, one advanced a stage

40. BOYIN RECEIVING HIGHER INSTRUCTION